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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

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WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: January 25, 2007

State of the Union Address

1. All major Austrian media continue to analyze and comment on US President George Bush's 2007 State of the Union Address. One Austrian daily headlines "The new Bush: the president as petitioner," and writes that Bush came across as modest and low-key, and presenting a "green agenda." The daily's Washington correspondent doubts, however, that even with his new, conciliatory approach the President will have a hard time winning over the Democrats in Congress.

Analyzing US President Bush's State of the Union Address, Washington correspondent for centrist daily Die Presse Norbert Rief argues Tuesday's speech was aimed at "pleasing the Democrats, who now control Congress. But even if they liked the address, Bush will have a hard time winning over Congress for his plans" and on Iraq, in particular, it is "completely out of the question," Rief believes. The President's "warning that America must not fail in Iraq went unheeded, with Senate and House majority leaders Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi stating they would hold Bush responsible for his Iraq course. With the Iraq topic, virtually nothing can be achieved in a Democrat-controlled Congress, which is why domestic policy issues played a major role in the speech. On that front, the US was suddenly faced with a 'new' George Bush, pushing a 'green agenda,' and talking about bio-fuel, wind energy and environment protection." By addressing these issues, the President "wants to win over Congress, as all these topics are key concerns for the Democrats," according to Rief. The correspondent concludes, however, it is "doubtful this approach by the US President will succeed during his last two years in office."

Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung in its analysis writes that the "Democrats reacted harshly" to President Bush's efforts in his State of the Union Address to "sell his new Iraq strategy." While "Bush underscored his view that the war on terror was a decisive, ideological battle, in which the security of the US was at stake... Democratic Senator Jim Webb in his reply accused the administration of having no concept: Bush did not really have a new strategy on Iraq, he had merely presented a number of tactical adaptations," says the Wiener Zeitung, quoting Webb. The US President's "push to keep up a policy of strength in Iraq was dismissed by the Democrats, who accused Bush of continuing to ignore the will of the nation," the daily says, but also notes that Bush "made concessions to the Democratic Party with his proposals on a more environment-conscious approach to energy consumption or tax cuts to facilitate the purchase of health insurance."

In mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung, Washington correspondent

Hans Janitschek points out that the US President for the first time in a State of the Union Address "discussed the issue of climate protection." Bush "caused quite a stir with his plans for climate protection and a concept for comprehensive health insurance." He "made the biggest impression on the Democrats with his proposal for a universal health insurance system for all Americans," Janitschek writes. The correspondent argues that, with his new approach, Bush may be trying to "salvage his presidency."

Mass-circulation daily Kurier runs the headline "Democrats cold-shoulder Bush," and points out that the US President "failed to get Democratic support for his tough course on Iraq." The "coolly polite atmosphere" during the State of the Union Address "reflects the new distribution of power in Congress." Another "signal" was the fact that it was "not Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi who delivered the traditional reply for the Democrats, but Senator Jim Webb. The former Republican and ex-marine from Virginia is well known for his determined criticism of the Iraq war," the Kurier says, and suggests "Webb's main accusation was that US 'soldiers today can no longer have faith in their supreme commander's judgment.'"

Liberal daily Der Standard quotes the US President as asking Americans to "give the Iraq strategy a chance," but says "Bush's critics cold-shouldered him immediately." According to the daily, "those who believed George Bush would use the State of the Union Address as an opportunity to ruefully admit having made mistakes were completely wrong." Instead, the US President "reiterated, almost word by word, what he had said earlier on the war in the Middle East: Iraq was the central front of a global war on terror, and retreat was not an option, because the consequences would be disastrous," the daily quotes Bush, commenting that he was "painting the picture of a dangerous, spreading wildfire." The reactions to his call to give his strategy for Iraq a chance, however, "demonstrated how much resistance the President is likely to meet with in the coming weeks and months." Like Kurier, the Standard believes it was "no coincidence the Democrats chose Jim Webb to deliver the traditional reply to the State of the Union Address: His patriotism, coupled with his military experience is above suspicion."

Mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich focuses on President Bush's plans for the environment, and headlines "Bush following in Arnie's footprints." His approach to bank on environment issues "caused quite a stir, including his proposal to cut gasoline consumption by 20 percent in the next decade" and to boost "alternative energy sources such as hybrid technology, wind power, or bio-fuel," the daily says. These plans "earned him the applause of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger," Oesterreich notes.

In its analysis, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten writes that, in the face of poor popularity ratings, George Bush in his State of the Union Address attempted to give his presidency new momentum." He "opted for conciliatory tones," but "was adamant on his Iraq course." Like all Austrian media, the daily points out that the Democrats "rejected Bush's Iraq strategy" in particular, but emphasizes that the US President "urged cooperation of both parties." However, "faith in his credibility has declined, as even Republican insiders admit these days. Ultimately, the question is, which side will prevail with its agenda?"

Kilner